

**AVP as an agent of change:  
the pilot evaluation of the  
Alternatives to Violence Project  
in three British prisons**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **About the evaluation**

The evaluation aimed to investigate the impact that AVP has on participants in British prisons. This evaluation focused on the outcomes for participants, not on issues of efficiency and effectiveness of organising AVP workshops in prisons.

This evaluation took place in three prisons: Cookham Wood (a women's prison), Grendon (a therapeutic male prison), and Swaleside (a male prison). It was conducted by a team of 10 AVP volunteers who had at least a basic understanding of AVP and were given technical support and training from an evaluation facilitator. Staff and prisoners were involved in helping the evaluators decide on the focus for the evaluation.

39 prisoners were interviewed by the evaluators for between 30 minutes to one hour. Two of those interviewed at Cookham Wood were facilitators.

### **Evaluation findings**

#### *Violence*

AVP is successful in helping participants develop a broader understanding of violence. Two thirds of respondents reported that they understood violence to be more than just physical, as promoted by AVP. Of these, almost half stated that this had changed as a result of the workshop.

#### *Conflict resolution*

The great majority of respondents agreed that they were at least partly responsible for the conflict in their lives. Of these, half said that their understanding of their responsibility had increased since doing the workshop, while a third stated that they had learned this through other programmes and experiences. There were clear gender differences.

Only slightly more than a third of respondents thought that they had handled their most recent conflict well, while nearly half thought that they had handled it badly. One quarter of these conflicts were with other inmates, and one fifth had ended with physical blows. A significant minority of conflicts had been with staff.

Half of respondents thought that their ability to resolve conflicts non-violently had improved since they had taken an AVP workshop. A further third stated that their ability to deal successfully with conflict had improved since they had been in prison, but this was due to other factors



such as greater maturity and other prison programmes. Women at Cookham Wood reported the greatest improvement in this ability as a result of the workshops.

#### *Techniques and skills of non-violence*

AVP is effective in helping participants to learn new skills in this area. Two thirds of respondents described examples where they had used techniques or skills of non-violence that they had learned in AVP. The most frequently used skills included: listening to people more attentively (17%), thinking before acting (14%), and thinking about the other person's perspective (14%). Respondents spoke about how they had begun to view the humanity of their opponent, how their awareness had increased about the role of body posture in reducing aggression, how they had successfully used 'I-messages' and how they had learned to step back and think about the other person's perspective.

Of these, four fifths of respondents stated that using these skills was different from what they would have done before the workshops.

Over two thirds of those who had used the skills said that using the skills had helped to improve relationships, mostly with family but also with prison staff.

Fewer than one in ten respondents made any references to Transforming Power. This suggests that AVP needs to work harder to communicate this aspect of the programme.

Less than one fifth of respondents thought that there were some AVP skills that could never be put into practice, suggesting that AVP skills and techniques are largely appropriate for prison populations.

#### *Connecting actions with feelings*

Two thirds of respondents stated that the workshops had helped them to get better insight into how they respond in a confrontational situation

Just under half of respondents understood that feelings and actions were connected. Over half of the female respondents in the study thought they were unrelated. AVP needs to find ways of communicating this relationship more effectively.

Of those that understood the relationship between feelings and actions, one third had learned this as a result of the workshop, while the workshop helped to reinforce it for a further 40%.

### *The workshops*

All respondents spoke highly of the workshops. They felt that they had been valued and treated with respect, as equals. They felt they had been positive, open and encouraging to others.

Affirmation exercises were successful in helping respondents feel better about themselves at Cookham Wood and Swaleside but not at Grendon.

The workshops created an environment where respondents felt able to explore and express their feelings. The ground rules were considered to have been helpful in allowing people to relax and feel safe.

Over two thirds of respondents reported that they have felt better about themselves since the workshop, suggesting that AVP is good at raising the self-value or self-esteem of participants. Respondents commented on how they felt like being 'more helpful', 'more assertive', 'more light-hearted' and 'more self accepting' than before.

Under half of respondents stated that the workshops helped them to remember a time in their lives that they had already used non-violence. Grendon participants had the greatest difficulty in successfully retrieving memories of conflicts resolved non-violently. This is a cornerstone of AVP as it helps participants to realise that they too have the power to resolve conflicts non-violently if they persevere. AVP needs to find more effective ways to help participants connect with their own power to resolve conflicts successfully. This may also be associated with the need to improve communication of Transforming Power, as highlighted above.

However, the workshops were successful in providing almost all respondents with opportunities to practice alternative ways of resolving conflicts. Most frequently, the role plays were reported as being a useful vehicle for providing such opportunities.

### *Facilitators*

Virtually all respondents spoke highly of the facilitators' commitment and professionalism. It was very important to two thirds of respondents that the facilitators are unpaid volunteers. This was particularly the case for Grendon.

Nearly all respondents knew that inmates could become AVP facilitators and most thought that this was a good idea as inmate facilitators would be better able to relate to the realities of prison life and experience. However, respondents at Cookham Wood commented that the choice of some of the inmate facilitators had not been helpful due to their particular crimes.



However, the two inmate facilitators interviewed at Cookham Wood expressed how their training and experience of facilitating had helped them make enormous strides forward in improving their communication skills and confidence.

#### *Involvement in the evaluation*

A substantial majority of respondents had been involved in selecting outcomes on which the evaluation was to focus. There was a relationship between involvement in deciding the focus of the evaluation and participation in the evaluation interviews. Swaleside prisoners were not involved in the pre-evaluation discussions and demonstrated the most reluctance to participate in the evaluation.

#### **Recommendations for AVP programming**

AVP needs to focus on the following areas for improvement:

- clearer communication Transforming Power
- successfully enabling participants get in touch with their previous experiences of non-violence
- increasing effective ways of developing participants' understanding of the relationship between feelings and actions
- more frequent opportunities in each prison AVP works within to deliver courses and ensure that access remains open to previous participants who want another dose
- ensuring that voluntary participation is upheld, and coercive regimes are actively discouraged

#### **Recommendations for future evaluations**

- Although this evaluation went some way in involving prisoners and staff prior to the evaluation, greater effort must be made to involve prisoners and staff in the evaluation process prior to the evaluation.
- Categories developed during the analysis of the qualitative data collected during this pilot evaluation could be used to develop appropriate tick boxes for future evaluation interview schedules. This would enable more respondents to be interviewed, in a shorter period of time.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study**

### **1.1 An introduction to the Alternatives to Violence Project**

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a community-based organisation that offers a series of three-day experiential workshops in prisons and the community exploring conflict resolution techniques and alternatives to violence (Bitel and Edgar, 1998; Bitel, 1998; Garver & Reitan, 1995; Rucker, 1991).

AVP grew out of a 1975 initiative in a maximum security prison in New York, when prisoners asked a local community group to help them develop a programme which would address the issue of violence inside the prison and in their home communities. This initiative evolved into the AVP, when the concepts and instructions for the exercises were formalised in a series of manuals for each level of the programme. The name was chosen after some of the volunteer facilitators were casually referred to at the prison entrance as "those alternatives to violence people" (Steve Angell, personal communication). Regular workshops are now held in over 50 prisons in New York State and this programme has spread to over 25 other states. AVP programmes are now offered in over fifteen countries in every continent (Bitel and Edgar, 1998).

AVP workshops are open to anyone but are often most useful for individuals who have problems with violence, either because they are the perpetrators of violence, or because they suffer the effect of other people's violence (Casale and Haughton, 1997). All participants must be self-referred, and therefore are taking part in a voluntary capacity.

All the workshops are run by volunteers. The facilitators lead participants through a series of exercises, games and role plays. There is no formal

teaching and the ethos of the group work is that all people have experienced alternatives to violence in their lifetimes. The workshops provide space for people to bring and share their experiences, from which participants and facilitators can learn.

AVP aims to complement other prison programmes rather than seeking to replace them (Casale and Haughton, 1997). Workshops are offered on two levels: Basic and Second Level. The Basic workshop works on self-esteem, communication skills, co-operation and encourages participants to begin to practice conflict resolution. The second level workshop involves exercises that go a little deeper into the hidden causes of violence and follow a theme which is chosen by the participants such as anger, or forgiveness of self and others.

There is also an opportunity for some graduates to become facilitators and go to take a Training for Facilitators course. This gives participants training and other group-work skills to enable them to facilitate workshops with others. This opportunity is open to both community and prison-based residents.

A confidentiality agreement based on building community on trust and mutual respect surrounds the content of workshop. In prisons the facilitators do not write reports on individuals in the workshop.

AVP Britain was launched in 1991 and has rapidly developed, with a central co-ordinating group, 11 local groups and three paid workers by 1996. AVP Britain is currently developing the prison-based work, with regular programmes in HMP Grendon, HMP Cookham Wood, HMP Swaleside, HMYOI Onley, HMP Stafford, HMP Coldingley, HMP Risley, HMP Wymott, HMP Buckley Hall and HMP Wormwood Scrubs.



## **1.2 The need for evaluation**

Each session of every workshop concludes with a session evaluation whereby participants are asked for their feedback on each exercise: what they liked/ didn't like and suggestions for improvements. Furthermore, at the end of each workshop, participants are asked to write short unstructured evaluation comments and the facilitators write a final workshop evaluation incorporating the previous feedback.

However, at the present time, no rigorous evaluation work has been undertaken of the programme as a whole rather than the isolated training events. Attempts have been made to undertake crude evaluations, generally by prison authority stakeholders, such as a New Zealand prison psychologist (Curren, unpublished report, 1993). Such evaluation attempts have come under heavy criticism from the AVP leadership (Angell, unpublished document, 1994) leading to the contention that AVP may be impossible to properly evaluate. One often reported comment suggests that "the more measurable it is, the less it reflects what AVP is about" (AVP internal memorandum, 1995).

AVP workers (paid and unpaid) did initiate a regular evaluative review of the introduction of the programme at Cookham Wood, but the regularity has been interrupted by staff changes (Church and Hinds, unpublished report, 1997; Bitel and Church, unpublished report, 1995).

It has been reported also that prison governors see the programme as a valuable use of staff and prisoners' time, and that prisoners respond positively to the opportunity to explore conflict in their lives constructively (Casale and Haughton, 1997).

The position that it is impossible to effectively evaluate AVP is untenable. The Prison Service requires it, potential funders want it and a growing number of AVP organisers and facilitators believe that an appropriate evaluation would be very useful indeed. The question then arises as to what is an “appropriate” evaluation, especially one that is appropriate to the needs of the many stakeholders.

This pilot evaluation is one attempt to satisfy the needs of the variety of stakeholders. It aims to shift the argument from “Should we evaluate AVP?” to dialogue about “*How best to evaluate AVP?*”

### **1.3 Principles and philosophy guiding the pilot evaluation**

Any evaluation of AVP must take into account that the programme is still relatively new to the British penal system and is constantly evolving and adapting to British penal structures, culture and shifting political contexts. As such the evaluation needs to be *formative* in order to take account of and inform further developments.

AVP is process-oriented and therefore the evaluation should describe the *process* experienced at the individual, institutional and organisational levels. The evaluation will focus on the collection of *qualitative* data in order to try to understand the processes that underlie implementation of the programme and integration of programme ideas into participants’ world views.

The evaluation should not be designed to evaluate the training per se, but rather the *outcomes* of the training over a longer period of time.

One of the main criticisms of previous attempts to evaluate AVP are that the methods of data collection have been intrusive and often contradictory of



AVP's ethos and ways of working. Therefore the proposed evaluation must be *participatory*.

As an independent organisation, AVP in a prison context does not exist to promote the interests of prisoners, nor the prison authorities. It aims to work with individuals to raise awareness of alternatives to violence to benefit the wider social milieu, be it at the unit of the family, the prison or the wider society. Therefore, it is important that when the principle of participation is raised within a context of evaluation, that participation is *inclusive* of the prisoners, the prison staff, and AVP. Therefore any evaluation approach must include input from all the stakeholders in the design and data collection stages.

As previously mentioned a growing number of stakeholders are requesting the evaluation. It is important that the evaluation is *responsive* to their needs. It is likely that there will be competing and contradictory needs from the different stakeholders. These differences will need *negotiation* in order to reach satisfactory compromises where all stakeholders have their interests registered and some of them satisfied by the evaluation methods. Resolving this conflict is integral to the evaluation. Conflict resolution is at the heart of the work of AVP and therefore any resolutions of competing interests may have a profound effect on the stakeholders.

As such, it is important to recognise that *the evaluation process itself has potential for being an agent of change*.

This pilot evaluation should be judged on its ability to address and reconcile these principles.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Prisons and violence

Offenders convicted of violent offences are routinely given custodial sentences and sent to prison. As such, prisons tend to be populated with high numbers of violent offenders. Many of these offenders continue to perpetrate violence inside the prison.

Recent Home Office research found that thirty-nine percent of young offenders reported that they had threatened violence in the preceding month, while thirty-two percent had actually assaulted another prisoner (O'Donnell and Edgar, 1996). The levels of violence inside adult establishments was somewhat lower, but still significant. Nineteen percent of adult prisoners reported that they had threatened violence and sixteen percent admitted to assault (O'Donnell and Edgar, 1996).

Prison staff are aware that very few of these incidents are actually reported. Under-reporting of violence is thought to be due to the fear of retaliation, prisoner loyalty to the code against *grassing*, or a desire not to lose face (O'Donnell and Edgar, 1996).

As such, prisons and prisoners need programmes to reduce violence.

### 2.2 What works?

A landmark paper by Martinson (1974) concluded that when it came to rehabilitative programmes within prisons, '*nothing works*'. This position was soon challenged (Palmer, 1975; Gendreau and Ross, 1980) and by 1979 Martinson recanted.



McGuire and Priestley (1985) assembled a sizeable list of studies in which promising outcomes had been obtained, and findings from Gendreau and Ross (1987) began to shift to the view *that most things have been found to sometimes work*.

Although knowing that most things work sometimes gives encouragement to those who work towards the rehabilitation of offenders, it is not very instructive in what should be done. McGuire and Priestley (1995) set about using evidence from meta-evaluations (such as Lipsey and Wilson, 1993; Losel, 1993; Izzo and Ross, 1990; and Garrett, 1985) in order to distinguish what has been proved not to work and what works sometimes.

What does not work includes classical psychotherapeutic models<sup>1</sup>, medical models and punishment (McGuire and Priestley, 1995).

McGuire and Priestley (1995) reported that there was no evidence that there was any 'single, outstanding approach that is by itself guaranteed to work as a means of reducing recidivism' (p.13). Instead they produced guidelines for more effective programmes. These include:

- *risk classification* – higher-risk individuals receive more intensive interventions;
- *criminogenic needs* – distinguishing client problems or features that contribute to or are supportive of offending from those that are more distantly related;
- *responsivity* – the learning styles of most offenders require active, participatory methods of working;

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<sup>1</sup> There is some evidence from research conducted at HMP Grendon that psychotherapy in a therapeutic community setting can be effective in reducing criminality among personality disordered offenders (Tim Newell, personal communication).

- *community base* – programmes located in the community on balance yield more effective outcomes, as proximity to individuals' home environments has a greater prospect of facilitating real-life learning;
- *treatment modality* – more effective programmes tend to be multimodal, addressing a breadth of offenders' problems; and skills oriented, such as problem-solving, social interaction or other types of coping skills;
- *programme integrity* – effective programmes are those in which the stated aims are linked to the methods being used, and where there are adequate resources to train and support programme staff.

(extracted from McGuire and Priestley, 1995, p.14)

Lipsey (1995) adds depth to the list of criteria that lead to effective programmes. Programmes that have a concrete, behavioural or skills oriented character tend to be more effective. 'Sufficient' programme dosage is also recommended, and a figure of 100 contact hours, delivered at two or more contacts a week over a period of 26 weeks or more is suggested.

### **2.3 Does AVP meet the criteria of successful programmes?**

AVP fully meets three of McGuire and Priestley's (1995) criteria for successful programmes and one of the two additional criteria cited by Lipsey (1995). These are responsivity – AVP is very participatory and interactive; treatment modality – AVP works on helping participants to build on their positive strengths, improve their communication and co-operation skills, and enables them to dissect conflict situations and rehearse positive outcomes through role play; programme integrity is met through well trained and supported volunteers delivering tailor-made courses to participants who have volunteered; and the workshops are behaviour/skills oriented and offer



models of positive reinforcement which have been demonstrated to work better overall (McGuire and Priestley, 1995).

AVP goes some way in meeting two of McGuire and Priestley (1995) criteria: criminogenic needs – AVP encourages participants to work with their own experiences and provides some participants with interventions that are directly related to the multi-faceted problems in their lives; and community base – AVP is a community-based programme attracting volunteers from the outside, independent of the prison hierarchy and structure, but the intervention is delivered within the prison walls. In Britain a small but growing number of prisoners have gone on to continue with AVP as participants and facilitators once they have been released from custody.

AVP fails to meet one of McGuire and Priestley's (1995) criteria and one of Lipsey's (1995) criteria: risk classification – AVP is open to all offenders regardless of severity of offence; and programme dosage – AVP currently falls a long way short of 100 contact hours over a period of 26 weeks. The latter point could be overcome for some participants if AVP was offered with greater regularity, as participants would be able to take as many Second Level workshops as they chose (as each workshop has an unique theme). Prisoner facilitators also have the opportunity to get higher doses of the intervention through regular participation on AVP teams delivering workshops, but there have only been two such cohorts of prisoner facilitators to date: Grendon in 1994, and Cookham Wood in 1996.

## **2.4 How to measure programme success?**

Even if AVP goes some way in meeting the suggested criteria for successful programmes, how can programme success be measured? In terms of evaluation, under-reporting of violent incidents means that simply monitoring levels of reported violence in the prison would not be a reliable indicator of a

programme's performance. Other more subtle indicators of programme effectiveness must be sought.

Following in American tradition, reconviction rates are increasingly being used in Britain as indicators of programme effectiveness. However, reconviction is an extremely crude way to look at the after-effects of a programme, as it is often defined in terms of return to prison rather than re-offending. Not everyone who re-offends is reconvicted (Kimmitt Edgar, personal communication). Reconviction is only at best an unreliable measure which fails to take into account which criminogenic factors played the biggest role in the return to crime.

Having dismissed reported levels of violence inside the prison and reconviction rates, what measures can be used to indicate programme success?

An international gathering of conflict resolution trainers in Europe met in 1996 to discuss the difficulties of evaluation conflict resolution work (CCCRTE, 1996). One of the key issues identified was the measurement of outcomes, intended and unintended. But a widespread stumbling point identified was the problem of measurement disrupting the training experience. The use of pre- and post test scales and questionnaires in Curren's (1993) attempts to evaluate AVP was heavily criticised as disrupting the programme dynamics of trust and independence, and as such, disrupting programme integrity.

## **2.5 Outcomes and performance indicators**

Oakley *et al* (1995) suggest that the only way of evaluating the effectiveness of a programme or service is by measuring its outcome.



Patton (1997) suggests that performance indicators can encourage recording of what is easy to record rather than what is important. He suggests that this risk can be reduced by ensuring that intended outcomes are stated without due regard to measurement:

*Once [groups] have stated as carefully and explicitly as they can what they want to accomplish, then it is time to figure out what indicators and data can be collected to monitor outcome attainment.... To emphasise this point, let me overstate the trade-off. I prefer to have soft or rough measures of important goals rather than having precise, quantitative measures of goals that no-one much cares about. In too many evaluations, program staff are forced to focus on the latter (meaningless but measurable goals) instead of on the former (meaningful goals with soft measures).*

(Patton, 1997, cited in Russell, 1998)

During the past few years, arguments have taken place over the worldwide electronic AVP newsgroup list, that reflect Patton's concerns. Reconviction rates may be easy to measure but preventing reconviction is not an explicitly stated goal of AVP. Stated outcomes tended to be more woolly, such as "helping prisoners to lead more peaceful and constructive lives."

As such one of the first tasks for this evaluation was to set about defining a set of well-defined and meaningful outcomes against which the progress of inmate participants could be measured. This process is covered in greater detail in Chapter 3.

## **2.6 Participatory and negotiated evaluation**

Chapter 1 set out some principles and philosophies on which the pilot evaluation of AVP should be based. These included the notion that the

evaluation must be participatory, in order to remain constant to programme ethos, and inclusive, which inferred that a certain amount of negotiation would be needed between the different stakeholders to agree the evaluation parameters.

Greene (1997) states that "evaluators today should make special efforts to seek out and include those voices and perspectives that are often overlooked or excluded from the evaluative conversation" (p.28).

Rebein (1997) states that the distinction between participatory and conventional evaluation is that truly participatory evaluations involve agents of programme delivery and end-users in all phases of the evaluation, whereas conventional evaluations concentrate decision-making powers at the level of funders, managers, and consultants. Participatory evaluation is framed within a continuum from low to high participation in evaluation activities.

Gran (1983) identifies six phases in an evaluation process: (1) funding; (2) choice of questions; (3) methodological design; (4) implementation; (5) distribution and readership; and (6) use. A challenge for this evaluation will be to try to engage the most disenfranchised and powerless stakeholders, the prisoners, somewhere along this continuum.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have been at the forefront of evaluations where a key dynamic is negotiation. Guba and Lincoln (1989) characterised the discipline of evaluation as evolving in a series of waves. The first generation was measurement-oriented; the second generation was description-oriented; the third generation judgement-oriented; and coined the term *fourth generation evaluation* to describe evaluations which involved negotiation and construction.



Fourth generation evaluation requires all stakeholders to be treated as equal partners in every aspect of design, implementation, interpretation and resulting action. The evaluators do not impose their methodology on the evaluation, but rather use their knowledge of evaluation to assist the other stakeholders in the formulation of an appropriate *emergent* evaluation methodology during the stages of negotiation.

However, such idealistic approaches have been strongly criticised and dismissed as being unrealistic by Pawson & Tilley (1997) who suggest that Guba and Lincoln's negotiations "belong to the cosy suburban world of the meeting between school governors, teachers and parents in which they thrash out homework policy for the fifth grade" (p.20).

According to Pawson and Tilley (1997) the asymmetries of power that often exist between stakeholders means that negotiation cannot realistically be conducted amongst equal players. Given the different power relations that exist in a penal setting, this negotiation would be likely to be quite problematic and herein lies the second challenge for the pilot evaluation. A full account of this process is given in Chapter 3.

This challenge is an important one as other authors concur with the need to ensure that there is a high degree of consensus between the various stakeholders (Bramley, 1996; Fetterman *et al*, 1996).

Finally, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) approach acknowledges that the evaluators themselves are likely to be agents of change rather than suggesting that their presence should have no effect on the programme during the evaluation process.

## 2.7 Towards a realistic evaluation

Pawson and Tilley (1997; 1995) propose that in order for evaluation to be realistic, evaluation should be *theory-led* with realistic theories on program mechanisms:

The first task of an evaluation is to flesh out a theory or set of theories linking measure, mechanism, context and outcome pattern. This will then inform the measurement tasks to follow.

Pawson and Tilley (1995, p.10)

Programme evaluation can only be as good as the theory which underpins it (Pawson and Tilley, 19997). Greene (1996) also affirms the need for “contextually grounded *local programme theory*.” Once a programme theory has been constructed, research can be undertaken to identify if the hypothesised agents of change are acting in the expected manner. Such theories will also offer data to unravel mysteries as to “which individuals, subgroups and locations might benefit readily from the programme, and which social and cultural resources are necessary to sustain the changes” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.85).

## 2.8 Developing a programme theory for AVP

Following the logic in the preceding section, it is necessary to construct a theory of how AVP is meant to work.

The overall aim of AVP to facilitate healing and restoration of offenders and community members has led to AVP's inclusion among the breadth of Restorative Justice programmes.<sup>2</sup> Bitel (1998) attempted to formalise a theory for the change mechanism for AVP as indicated in Figure 1. This

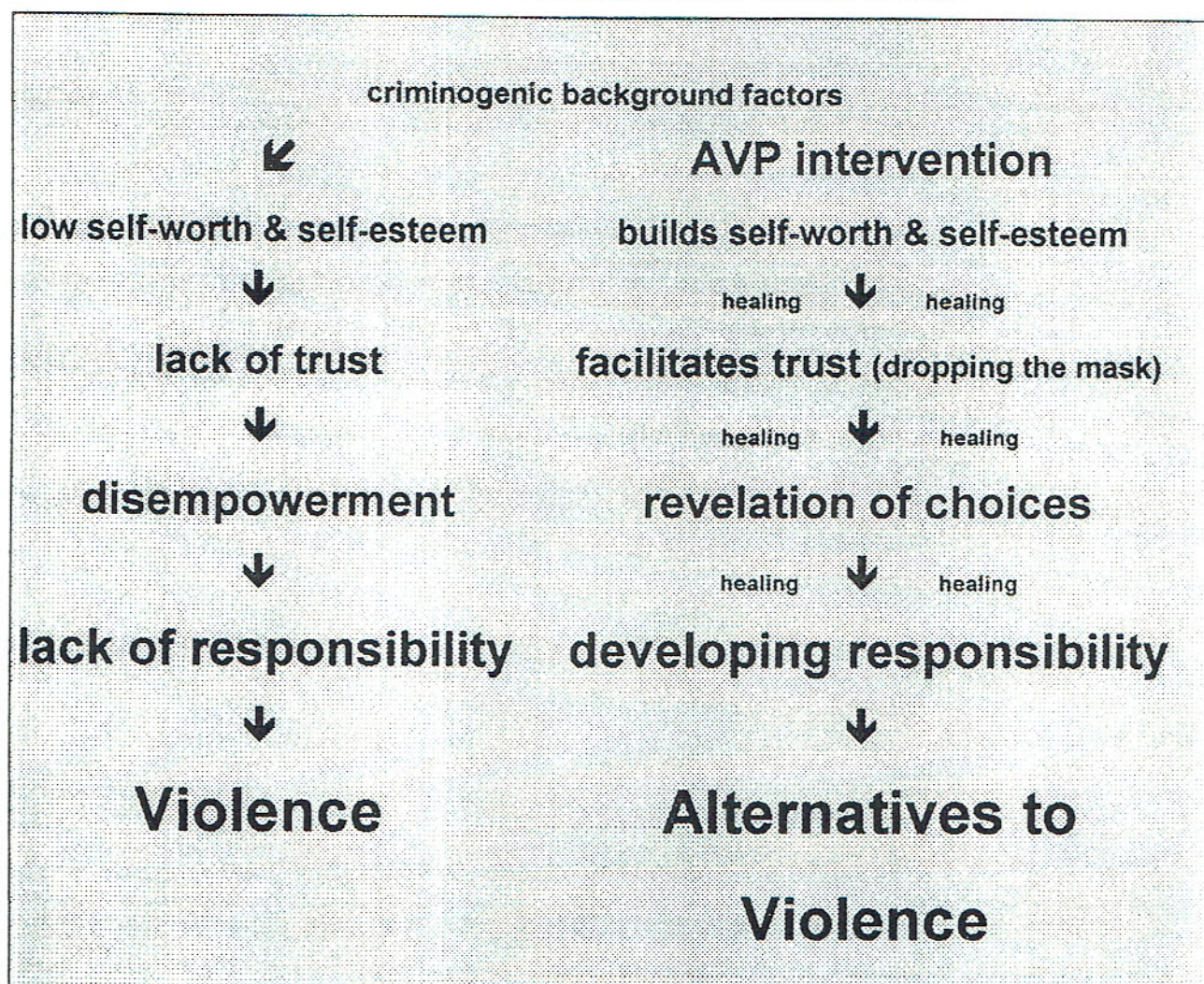
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<sup>2</sup> See *Humanity and Society – Special issue: The Brea(d)th of Restorative Justice* Volume 22, No. 1.



involves rebuilding self-worth through affirmation; creating a trusting and supportive community where it is safe to discuss difficult issues; the revelation of choice in dangerous situations; developing responsibility; and building confidence to deal more productively with violence.

*Figure 1: Theoretical model for the mechanism of change for AVP*



- **Rebuilding self-worth through affirmation**

It is very easy for prisoners to focus on their lack of self worth. Surrounded by barred windows, the prison environment constantly reinforces that they are 'bad' people. During AVP workshops, participants are asked to draw



from within themselves all that is good. This is not to deny that they may have acted with appalling violence, and indeed some participants have to dig back a very long way to rediscover their good. However, the workshops serve as an antidote to counteract the constant reinforcement of their lack of 'goodness'. Once participants have got in touch with the good inside of them, it can serve to give them hope that this quality is still accessible to them today.

Rebuilding self worth is crucial to creating alternatives to violence. When people feel bad about themselves, they often have little regard for themselves or others, and often feel that they have little to lose by acting violently. Conversely, when people feel good about themselves, they are often able to value themselves sufficiently not to harm themselves by harming others.

- **Creating a trusting and supportive community**

AVP uses a range of exercises and games that foster cooperation and build community. One of the key things in prison is to make this learning process fun, as laughter too, can be a channel for healing even in prison.

As trust develops, prisoners are able to shed the 'masks' that they often hide behind. This opens up opportunities for further change.

- **Revelation of choices**

Participants are also helped to realise that they have all made choices to avoid violence in some situations in their lives. This reinforces the point that we all have the ability to choose alternatives to violence – if we are committed to finding an alternative – and that choosing alternatives to violence is not purely the domain of saints and the virtuous.



- **Developing responsibility**

In AVP workshops, participants learn to understand how sometimes even small verbal prompts or gestures can serve to trigger the escalation of a conflict or the de-escalation of a conflict. This serves to highlight the power of each individual to some extent in influencing the outcome of a conflict. This knowledge serves to highlight the choices people make when they are faced with conflicts. And where people have choices, they also have responsibility for the choices they make. This can be quite a revelation to some participants, who may not have made the connection about the choices they have had in a situation, and therefore have not been able to accept any responsibility for the outcome.

- **Confidence building for conflict transformation versus conflict suppression**

AVP workshops give participants opportunities to practice alternatives to violence through experiential approaches. The focus of these workshops is not on how to 'behave' and not on rigid rules of behaviour. Other programs attempt to control violence through suppression of behavioural patterns, or self control. AVP takes an entirely different approach, by getting people to acknowledge their feelings, particularly anger, but getting them to connect this with what is good and of value in themselves in order that they express their anger in a more constructive and nonviolent way. The AVP jargon for this process is *Transforming Power*. Participants are lead through a reflective session on a variety of techniques to transform potentially violent situations into situations which have nonviolent outcomes. Participants then share their experiences of times when they have used this so-called Transforming Power, without ever having realised that they had used it. Once again, this serves to reinforce that these techniques are accessible to all who are committed to seek a nonviolent outcome.

## **2.9 Is AVP an agent of change?**

Having worked through some of the theoretical issues, the task remains to identify if AVP is effective as an agent of change, equipping offenders with alternatives to violence.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Getting started**

The proposal to undertake the evaluation was conceived in May 1996. A formal proposal was written and funding sought from potential donors.

In July 1996, permission to proceed was granted by the AVP Britain Co-ordinating Group.

Formal permission was required from other stakeholders: LEAP/AVP and Ox-Bucks AVP, who were co-ordinating the longest running AVP programmes in Britain; and the Prison Service. Permission was granted by these stakeholders by November 1996, although final approval still needed to be obtained by the governors of the target prisons.

### **3.2 The three prisons selected for the pilot evaluation**

The three prisons involved in the pilot evaluation shown in Table 1 were chosen because they had established programmes and they had different characteristics.

In order for the findings of the evaluation to be reliable, the evaluation needed to take place in three very different types of prisons. The findings from an evaluation conducted in only one location could not necessarily be transferred to another location (Fetterman *et al*, 1996). Findings could be said to be due to particular circumstances in the prison or due to AVP programme differences. However if similar findings were to emerge from three prisons with different characteristics, the findings would have higher reliability and could be said to be applicable to other AVP programmes in other British prisons.

*Table 1: The three British prisons involved in the pilot evaluation*

<b>Prison establishment</b>	<b>Characteristics of prisons and AVP programmes</b>
HMP Cookham Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• women's prison</li> <li>• Rochester, Kent</li> <li>• AVP running workshops since 1995 (4-6 p/a)</li> </ul>
HMP Grendon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• category B therapeutic male prison</li> <li>• near Aylesbury, Bucks</li> <li>• AVP running workshops since 1992 (4 p/a)</li> </ul>
HMP Swaleside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• category B male training prison</li> <li>• Isle of Sheppey, Kent</li> <li>• AVP running workshops since 1996 (6 p/a)</li> </ul>

### **3.3 The evaluation working party**

An article appeared in the August 1996 edition of the AVP Britain newsletter to recruit volunteers into an evaluation working party (EWP). By mid-September, approximately 15 people had requested to join the EWP. This necessitated a self-selection process and prospective members were invited to a half-day information session.

A ten member evaluation working party (EWP) was recruited from AVP and other appropriate volunteers, including two representatives from the AVP Britain Co-ordinating Group. Members of the EWP ranged from being experienced AVP facilitators to having taken one AVP workshop only.

The fact that all members of the EWP had taken at least one AVP workshop and many were committed to AVP as volunteer facilitators was not thought to compromise the credibility of the evaluation. Everitt (1996) suggests that all scientists and evaluators bring their own value system to their investigations



and that the process of generating evidence about practice and its effects is 'imbued' with values. As such, subjectivity should be valued in evaluation. Nevertheless, in order to increase objectivity, none of the group members had trained in the prisons they were to visit.

The EWP members came from a wide spectrum of professional backgrounds including social work, further education, peace workers, alternative health practitioners, a health educator, a prison chaplain, and a criminological researcher.

The lead researcher provided focus, support, training and expert knowledge to the evaluation group over a period of 10 months. This included training in questionnaire construction, evaluation and interview techniques. *Keeping on Track* (Ellis et al, 1990) was used as a guide and resource.

The EWP members were paid out of pocket expenses. This enabled AVP facilitators from regional groups outside London to be involved in the evaluation and spread the anticipated learning from the evaluation.

The EWP met five times prior to approaching any of the prisons:

- *Introductory day*: concepts of evaluation and suggested outcomes of AVP (October, 1996)
- *Methodology* workshop and outcomes revisited (November, 1996)
- *Finalising outcomes* (December, 1996)
- *Team Building & Negotiation* workshop (January, 1997)
- *Interview skills & approaching the prisons* (February, 1997)

In January 1997, the EWP members were split into three smaller teams, each with a focus round a particular prison. By April 1997, all teams had visited their target prison to discuss the evaluation with the governor and appropriate liaison staff and had gained permission to proceed. Protocol at

HMP Grendon required an additional application and presentation to the Grendon and Spring Hill Research Committee prior to final approval to proceed was granted.

Four further workshops were conducted after the prisons had given their approval. These included:

- *Questionnaire construction* (March, 1997)
- *Questionnaire refinement and development of a code of practice for the EWP* (see Appendix 1) (April, 1997)
- *Interview practice* (May, 1997)
- *Questionnaire post-pilot feedback and review* (June, 1997)

The EWP met one more time after the interviews had been completed to debrief, to reflect on their experiences, and to formally lay down the working party.

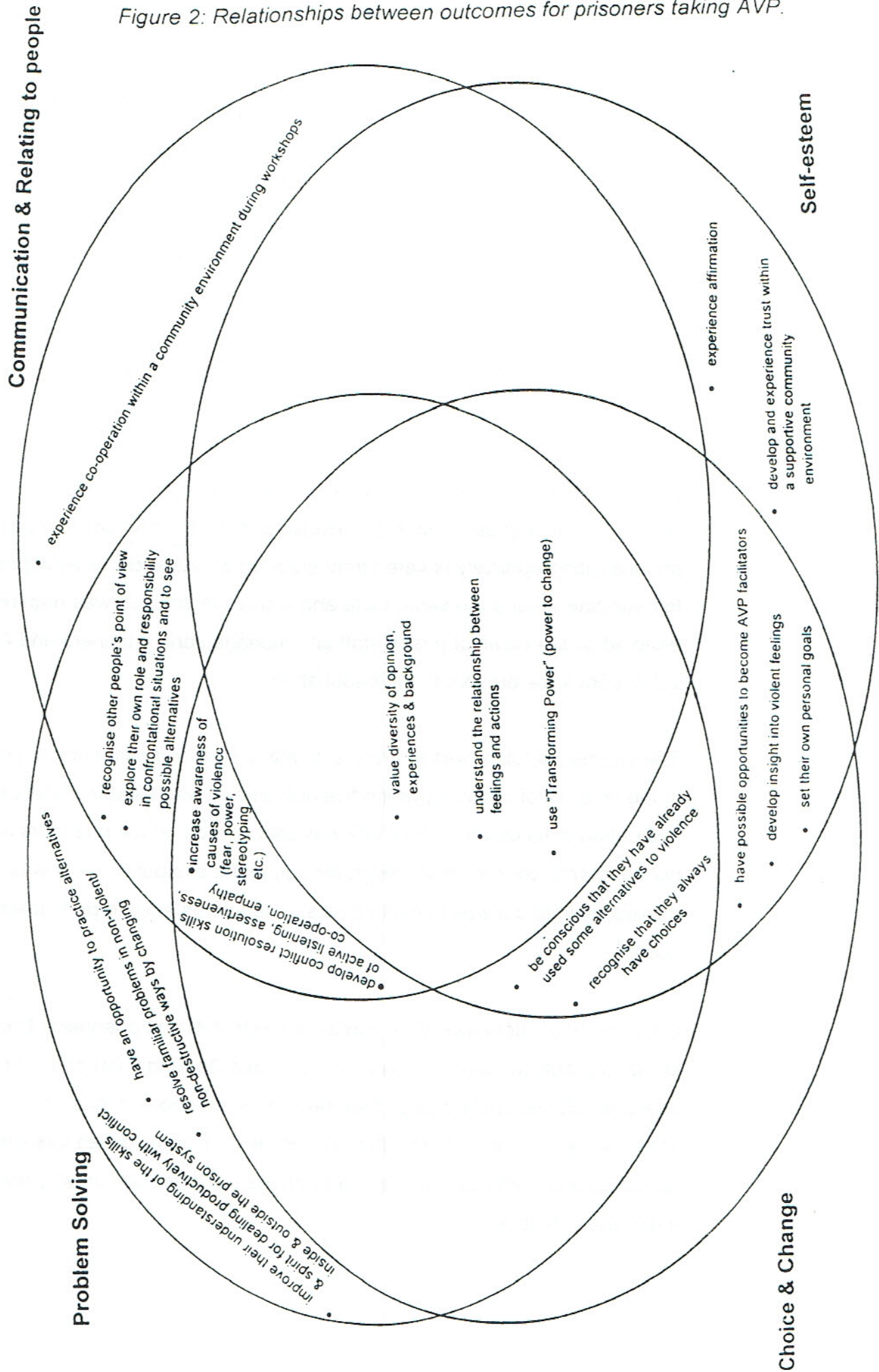
### **3.4 Negotiating outcomes within AVP**

Since AVP had no clearly defined outcomes at the start of the evaluation, developing programme outcomes was the first task of the evaluation working group. It took two intense working party sessions to develop sufficient consensus among the group before their recommendations were sent to the AVP Britain Co-ordinating Committee for their feedback and approval. Ten out of the twelve Co-ordinating Committee members sent their feedback. The EWP considered the feedback and finally reached consensus agreeing with eighteen outcomes (see Appendix 2a). These were then ratified by the AVP Britain Co-ordinating Group.

These eighteen outcomes were broadly grouped into four overlapping themes as shown in Figure 2: problem solving; choice and change; communication and relating to people; and self-esteem.



Figure 2: Relationships between outcomes for prisoners taking AVP.



However, it would not be manageable for the evaluation to investigate all eighteen outcomes, so there needed to be some prioritisation in order to select ten outcomes. But how should this be done?

### **3.5 Widening the net: negotiating outcomes with other stakeholders**

Prison staff, prisoners and AVP programme members were involved in a process of prioritising these outcomes.

The concept of negotiation between the stakeholders needed to be creatively handled as it needed to involve prison staff and prisoners in three prisons, geographically isolated from each other. As such it was impossible to negotiate around the same table and a creative solution was required that enabled all the views of prison staff and management, prisoners and AVP volunteers to be present in the negotiation.

The planned solution was to involve as many staff and prisoners as possible in the process of choosing which five outcomes it was most important for the evaluation to focus on. The EWP was concerned that the prisoners might not be interested in what we might include in the evaluation, so it was necessary to find a way to make it as simple and as easy to participate in as possible.

Short informal interviews were conducted with staff and prisoners. They were shown the outcomes on a laminated card (see Appendix 2a) and asked to select which ones they thought that the evaluation should focus on.

Their views were recorded by the interviewers. In some cases this involved recording their choices, but many also choose to elaborate on why they had made their choices.



In Grendon, all thirteen prisoners who had participated in AVP agreed to take part in the prioritisation process. In Cookham Wood eight out of fifteen prisoners who had participated in workshops agreed to be involved in the selection. However, in Swaleside, no prisoners were involved in the process because the volunteer evaluators had misunderstood the purpose of their visit and only sought views from the prison staff. (This may have had some interesting effect on the dynamics of the evaluation at Swaleside which are discussed in Chapter 4).

Since it was physically impossible to get all these stakeholders round a negotiating table at the same time or place, interviewers took on the role of acting as advocates, to put forward the views of those they had interviewed. *Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary* describes an advocate as an "intercessor" and "one who pleads the cause of another". Advocates are used in a variety of circumstances, particularly where there is an imbalance of knowledge or power between two parties. For example, in healthcare, advocates are sometimes used to promote service uptake in migrant communities; to ensure that the service users' needs are fully understood and addressed when they make use of healthcare services. In such cases, advocates are fluent in the knowledge and languages of both service provider and service user.

Similar knowledge and language differences can exist between prison staff and prisoners. The use of advocates in this evaluation would also ensure that all views were clearly articulated and that all views were given equal consideration, regardless of whether they came from a prison governor (high status) or a sex offender (low status).

The negotiation was long and intense. Of the ten outcomes prioritised by AVP programme volunteers, only 6 matched those selected as important by prisoners and prison staff. Interestingly, there was much congruency

between what outcomes the prison staff and prisoners thought the evaluation needed to focus on.

The involvement of prison staff and prisoners in the process of selection of evaluation parameters, which was then negotiated by the advocates, significantly changed the pattern of the outcomes that were finally investigated. Almost half of the outcomes originally thought important by the AVP volunteers were rejected after the advocates argued in favour of other outcomes. The ten outcomes that were finally selected after consultation and negotiation are shown in Appendix 2b.

This helped to refocus the evaluation on what were the really important areas for the evaluation to consider, ultimately making it more useful.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.6 Developing the interview schedule**

Once the outcomes had been selected, the EWP set about developing questions to ask the prisoners in order to explore if the intended outcomes were present. For example, for the outcome *Recognise other people's point of view*, a series of questions were developed:

- 2a. Do you think that different people can have different points of view?
- 2b. Did the workshop help you to understand other people's point of view?
- 2c. What do you do when someone disagrees with you (or if you disagree with them)?
- 2d. Can you give me an example?
- 2e. And when this happens, what do you feel?
- 2f. And has this changed since the workshop?

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<sup>3</sup> These findings were presented at the 1997 UK Evaluation Society conference, *Using advocates to address the asymmetries of power in stakeholder evaluations* (Bitel, 1997)



For each of the ten outcomes, the questions followed a similar pattern. Respondents were not able to give simple 'yes' or 'no' answers. Each section of questions required the respondents to give examples in order to check if the prisoners were simply telling the interviewers what they thought they wanted to hear them say ('socially desirable responses') or if they really had anything true and valid to say. Each time the respondents were also asked if any apparent changes were due to the AVP workshops or if they were attributable to other programmes or processes.

Because this line of questioning required very individual and sometimes lengthy responses, the data collection focused primarily on qualitative data.

Qualitative approaches to evaluation are 'currently widely accepted as legitimate lenses through which to examine meaningfulness and importance of social program interventions' (Green, 1996). Qualitative data has its limitations particularly when trying to prove causality. However, if the data collection is rigorous and methodologically sound, findings can meet acceptable levels of objectivity, reliability and validity:

Objectivity is the simultaneous realisation of as much reliability and validity as possible. Reliability is the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way (Kirk and Miller, 1986:20).

Qualitative data can meet these criteria, although the issue of validity is a question of "whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees" (Kirk and Miller, 1986:21).

The interview schedule was piloted with four prisoners at Grendon in June 1997. Minor changes were made as a result of the pilot, mostly to improve the flow of the questions. The final interview schedule was expected to take between thirty to sixty minutes to complete (see Appendix 3).

### **3.7 The interviews**

The interviews were conducted between June and July in 1997. A total of 39 prisoners were individually interviewed in the three prisons.

The interviews were conducted by pairs of evaluators, with one interviewer asking the questions and the other writing down the responses as verbatim as possible. The interviewers swapped roles in alternate interviews. The interviews were also tape recorded in order to serve as a back up for accurate interview notes.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, each respondent was given an information sheet about the evaluation and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 4).

### **3.8 Data analysis**

The recording interviewers were responsible for transcribing their notes for each interview.

The transcribed interviews were then subjected to thematic analysis to draw out trends and provide illustrative examples.

Two of the 39 subjects were dropped from the analysis. Both were from Grendon. One responded in the interview that he had taken AVP in a prison where AVP had never been offered, and he proceeded to answer the questions about an entirely different programme. The other was very disturbed at the time of interview and was waiting to be sectioned and transferred to a psychiatric unit.



## Chapter 4: Results and findings

### 4.1 Participation in the interviews

A total of 39 prisoners were interviewed. Their experience of AVP ranged between one and four workshops. The median and mode were both one workshop. Some had completed their workshops three years prior to the interviews, and others had taken their most recent AVP workshop just three months prior to the interview. The mean number of months between interview and participation was ten months. Two of the respondents interviewed were inmate trainers for AVP.

Participation in the interviews was variable. Table 2 shows the participation rates across the three prisons.

*Table 2: Participation in interviews for the pilot evaluation*

Prison	Number of AVP participants	Number involved in selection of outcomes	Number agreeing to be interviewed for evaluation
Grendon	13	13	13 (100%)
Cookham Wood	15	8	12 (80%)
Swaleside	28	nil	14 (50%)

Participation in the interviews appeared to be strongly related to participation in prioritising outcomes, although there may have been other unrelated reasons. At Grendon, where thirteen prisoners had been involved in the workshops, all of them had been involved in the selection of the outcomes. All thirteen later agreed to be interviewed for one hour during the evaluation. At Cookham Wood, even though only eight of the fifteen women who had attended workshops agreed to participate in the prioritisation exercise, twelve eventually agreed to be interviewed during the evaluation proper (presumably because word had got around that it was OK to join in). However, in Swaleside, where no prisoners were involved in the consultation about outcomes, of the 28 prisoners who had attended AVP workshops, only five agreed to be interviewed. This was later increased to fourteen after letters were sent to each prisoner asking him to be interviewed for the evaluation. This still only represented half of the prisoners who had taken AVP.

#### **4.2 Broader understanding of violence**

AVP appeared to be successful in helping participants develop a broader understanding of violence. 65% of respondents reported that they understood violence to be more than just physical, as promoted by AVP. For example:

*Violence can be ... like verbally running people down... so they feel useless and no good. That's a form of violence. (Grendon case 1)*

Of these, 46% stated that this had changed as a result of the workshop, while 17% stated that they already knew this due to other programming. All of the respondents who already understood that violence was more than just physical, came from Grendon.



### 4.3 Handling conflicts well

62% of respondents stated that the workshops had helped them to get better insight into how they respond in a confrontational situation, while 14% stated that it reinforced what they already knew.

*I learned a lot about my triggers on the workshop. (Grendon case 4)*

*Since I've done these three courses, I haven't been in a confrontation!  
That's good for me! (Swaleside case 7)*

*I stop, look and listen and think... whereas before I'd just rush in.  
Nowadays I can stop, look at the situation, you know, think about it,  
listen to what's being said, give my own opinion and vice versa. That's  
different from what I did before. But that's not just from AVP.  
(Grendon case 1)*

*AVP made us look at ourselves, which made you look at other  
people differently. (Grendon case 4)*

*When I first started AVP, on the very first course, I started to learn to control  
my temper. I've got a lot better understanding, which helps me to control  
things better than I used to. (Cookham Wood case 9)*

The great majority of respondents agreed that they were at least partly responsible for the conflict in their lives.

*The workshop helped me to increase my awareness that I have to  
take responsibility for my violence. I can't just blame it on him because  
he did this to me. (Swaleside case 2)*





*I know that I can take it on myself to defuse the situation, rather than just being a pawn. (Swaleside case 10)*

Of these, 50% said that their understanding of their responsibility had increased since doing the workshop, while 33% stated that they had learned this through other programmes and experiences.

None of the respondents that reported that they had learned about their responsibility in conflict outside of an AVP workshop were from Cookham Wood, highlighting the importance of AVP at this prison, where there are possibly fewer related programmes.

All respondents thought that different people could have different points of view. 51% stated that the workshop had helped them to develop this perspective, while 38% stated that they already knew this.

In a disagreement, 43% of respondents said that they would try to convince their opponent by talking, while 20% said that they would try to listen and understand the other person; 17% said that they would walk away; 9% said they would agree to disagree; and a further 9% said that they would stop to think about what the other person had said.

*I never thought you'd be able to resolve a conflict by sitting down and talking about it. I always thought if a man sticks his face in your face that it had to result in blows. Now I realise if a man sticks his face in yours, you can sit down and resolve the situation... if you really want to. It all seems to be boiling down to communicating with the person. (Grendon case 1)*

There were clear gender differences, as none of the women said they would walk away. There are a range of possible interpretations: women tend to be less physically violent than men, so the risk of the conflict escalating into

physical violence may be lower; prisoners at Grendon are subject to a 'no violence' rule, which might increase the likelihood that they walk away from conflicts rather than risk resolving them.

Only 36% thought that they had handled their most recent conflict well, while 45% of respondents thought that they had handled it badly. One quarter of these conflicts were with other inmates, and 17% ended with physical blows. 14% of conflicts had been with staff.

50% of respondents thought that their ability to resolve conflicts non-violently had improved since they had taken an AVP workshop. A further 31% stated that their ability to deal successfully with conflict had improved since they had been in prison, but this was due to other factors such as greater maturity and other prison programmes. Women at Cookham Wood reported the greatest improvement in this ability as a result of the workshops.

#### **4.4 Learning the techniques and skills of non-violence**

AVP appears to be effective in helping participants to learn new skills in this area.

65% of respondents described examples where they had used techniques or skills of non-violence that they had learned in AVP. The most frequently used skills included: listening to people more attentively (17%), thinking before acting (14%), and thinking about the other person's perspective (14%). Respondents spoke about how they had begun to view the humanity of their opponent, how their awareness had increased about the role of body posture in reducing aggression, how they had successfully used 'I-messages' and how they had learned to step back and think about the other person's perspective.



Of these, 81% stated that using these skills was different from what they would have done before the workshops, while 19% stated that they had learned these skills from other programmes. Grendon prisoners were most likely to state that they had learned these skills not just from AVP, suggesting that AVP complements other programming.

### **Listening**

*Out of all the things we done in the workshop, the main thing for me is actually listening, if that makes sense. It's made me ask myself, "Am I really listening to people? I mean really listening when someone is talking to me?" And because I now listen, I can see other people's point of view, other peoples' opinions.*  
(Cookham Wood case 5)

*If you can listen, you get more understanding. That's one thing I really learned in the workshop. Where usually you wouldn't listen. Now I think I'm more inclined to listen.* (Cookham Wood case 9)

### **Thinking before acting**

*The AVP course opened me up and makes me think before I say or do something silly.* (Swaleside case 1)

*Due to the four AVP courses, I go through more of a thinking process: "Where's this going to lead?" Before I would just think "sod it!" and go off.* (Swaleside case 7)

*We did a role play – officers and inmates getting stores. Normally if an officer said "No! You can't have one," we would say "We want one" back. Usually there would be a lot of screaming and we'd end up getting nicked. But they showed us a way of how to turn it round. Like if the officer said "Well there is not enough," we could say "Well when*

*you've done all the stores, if there is any left, then can we have one?"*  
*There are other ways that just arguing. All you've got to do is think.*  
(Cookham Wood case 3)

### **Thinking about the other person's perspective**

*Expect the best! Now I try to think of them as human beings not the enemy.* (Grendon case 5)

*Before AVP, if I disagreed with you, I'd wave my hands a lot. I didn't really realise before I went on the course what kind of effect it had on other people, especially if you were angry when you were doing it.*  
(Grendon case 6)

*Not telling people "You make me feel like this..." 'cos that puts them on the defensive.* (Cookham Wood case 2)

*I used to think that only my feelings mattered. AVP helped me to see it was important to recognise other people's positions.* (Swaleside case 10)

*It made me a lot more aware of other people's feelings rather than just seeing it from my own perspective. It's changed my perspective a little with everybody.* (Grendon case 3)

*One of the girls on the workshop, I've always seen her in the past as a trouble maker and aggressive. I came to understand her point of view a little better and now we get on. As a result of the workshop, I see that there is a reason she's like she is.* (Cookham Wood 2)

69% of those who had used the skills said that using the skills had helped to improve relationships, mostly with family but also with prison staff.



*Going to AVP helped me, because whenever I talked about my past... I'd just get angry, But now I have thought about my mum's journey and realise how she always copped the blame... It's brought me more close. I don't get so angry, I just sit there and actually talk to her... communicate.*  
(Grendon case 1)

*Certainly the staff on the wing seem to treat me differently. I don't have as many problems with them as I used to do.* (Swaleside case 2)

*One of the things I've noticed, even still now... we all recognise each other around the prison and that's one of the most positive benefits that came out of that group. Before the course we didn't know each other. But now we stop and say "hello" and chat with each other.*  
(Swaleside case 9)

*Staff have said they thought it (AVP) helped. They say I'm calmer now – a bit more tolerant. They've got more time for me now – they don't mind sorting things out for me now. Our relationship has got better.*  
(Cookham Wood case 3)

*Since I stopped behaving so aggressively, I've noticed that it's cooled other people down with me.* (Swaleside case 13)

Only 6% made any direct references to Transforming Power. This suggests that AVP needs to work harder to communicate this fundamental aspect of the programme.

Only 17% thought that there were some AVP skills that could never be put into practice, suggesting that by and large AVP offers skills and techniques that are largely appropriate and relevant for prison populations.

## 4.5 Connecting actions with feelings

43% of respondents understood that feelings and actions were connected, while another 43% did not think that there was a relationship between feelings and actions. Cookham Wood respondents were most likely to think that they were unrelated (58%). AVP needs to find ways of communicating this relationship more effectively.

*I'd never really thought about that... (how feelings and actions are connected)... before the workshop. But I've thought about it a lot since. You've got to remember, in these places we have as much time as we need to think and everything they said in the workshops goes over and over again in your head. (Cookham Wood case 3)*

Of those that understood the relationship between feelings and actions, 35% had learned this as a result of the workshop, while the workshop helped to reinforce it for a further 40% (reinforced only at Grendon).

## 4.6 Experience of the workshops

All respondents spoke highly of the workshops. They felt that they had been valued and treated with respect, as equals. They felt they had been positive, open and encouraging to others.

*I didn't expect it to be what it was. I thought it would be like three days in college... But I was really thankful that I did it because it was the best three days I had had in the last ten years. I really enjoyed it. It was like everybody had a bond. We was all talking... really communicating... I've never experienced anything like it before. (Grendon case 1)*



Affirmation exercises were successful in helping respondents feel better about themselves at Cookham Wood and Swaleside but not at Grendon.

The workshops created an environment where respondents felt able to explore and express their feelings. The ground rules were considered to have been helpful in allowing people to relax and feel safe.

69% of respondents reported that they have felt better about themselves since the workshop, suggesting that AVP is good at raising the self-value or self-esteem of participants. Respondents commented on how they felt like being 'more helpful', 'more assertive', 'more light-hearted' and 'more self accepting' than before.

*It made me more confident with people without being aggressive... to be more myself. (Grendon case 3)*

*On the workshop we talked about feelings and we were sharing our feelings. I'm very serious, I don't really know how to laugh. Whereas now I can a bit. I'm more relaxed with myself... I can laugh a bit more. The hardest bit is the first step and AVP gave me that. (Grendon case 4)*

*I got more involved with people than I generally do We laughed a lot, it let down my barriers. I saw different things in people that I never expected to see. (Grendon case 5)*

*Doing the course made me feel good about myself. After it was over and I received my certificate and I kept thinking about what we'd done on the course. (Grendon case 7)*

*Telling other people what you think is good about yourself, and what you have achieved. You wouldn't normally tell people that sort of stuff. (Swaleside case 3)*

*At the end, everyone wrote on a piece of paper what they thought of you. I still got it and I read it at times and it's like reminding. It gives you a good feeling. It was worth doing. (Cookham Wood case 6).*

Only 41% of respondents stated that the workshops helped them to remember a time in their lives that they had already used non-violence. Grendon participants had the greatest difficulty in successfully retrieving memories of conflicts resolved non-violently. This is a cornerstone of AVP as it helps participants to realise that they too have the power to resolve conflicts non-violently if they persevere. AVP needs to find more effective ways to help participants connect with their own power to resolve conflicts successfully. This may also be associated with the need to improve communication of Transforming Power, as highlighted above.

*It made me think of times I'd used alternatives to violence... You know, that programme inside of you, the mechanism that helps you prevent arguments. I could see how I was able to turn a situation around that prevented full-scale fisticuff blows. (Grendon case 9)*

*The T syndrome (he means TP) is with me all the time. I would never had used that before, but now I know. Ten months down the line and I'm still using it. It's still beneficial to me. (Swaleside case 10).*

However, the workshops were successful in providing 92% of respondents with opportunities to practice alternative ways of resolving conflicts. Most frequently, the role plays were reported as being a useful vehicle for providing such opportunities (50%).

*It certainly helps if you watch what other people do in the same situation as what you'd get yourself in. When you see how they act it out, you can see your own mistakes. (Cookham Wood case 9)*



There were only two comments from the respondents which could be said to have slightly negative undertones about AVP:

*I didn't see any relevance in what we did. It was just a bit of fun for me. At the end of the day, it took a bit of the prison away from me for the weekend. (Grendon case 12)*

*The AVP workshop was really intensive. For a whole week after, I was like wired and it was really horrible as there was no-one out there who could help me unwind, to push it all back down, put the lid on. There was a few people like this. If there was someone in the building you could go to, and slowly put it away, that would be ideal; but we were just left. It was really raw. There was no-one we could turn to. (Cookham Wood case 9)*

This raises an important point. AVP often serves as a bridge to other programmes. Participants may feel confident for the first time to speak about past painful experiences due to the high levels of trust in the workshop. Where other programmes or channels are available to continue to work on these issues, AVP can serve this bridging function. But what happens if there are no appropriate services or programmes in an establishment to complement AVP? The case above highlights this dilemma.

#### **4.7 Facilitators**

Virtually all respondents spoke highly of the facilitators' commitment and professionalism.

It was very important to 63% of respondents that the facilitators are unpaid volunteers. This was particularly the case for Grendon (73%).

*It's nice to know they are separate from the establishment. I think it's one of the most important things that they are separate. (Swaleside case 9)*

*I think it made it easier to accept, to be open... those people were not in there for any financial gain. There were there because they wanted to be there genuinely. They wanted to help people and it made it easier to be open and honest. (Grendon case 3)*

*They weren't just doing it as a job of work. They were genuinely kind. It sort of oozed out of them. They were really nice. (Grendon case 4)*

*Because they are not part of the institution, they are able to see things from a different perspective. They are taking you as you are and not somebody who's trying to manipulate you. (Grendon case 5)*

89% of the respondents knew that inmates could become AVP facilitators (rising to 100% in Cookham Wood), and 86% thought that this was a good idea as inmate facilitators would be better able to relate to the realities of prison life and experience. However, respondents at Cookham Wood commented that the choice of some of the inmate facilitators had not been helpful due to their particular crimes.

However, the two inmate facilitators interviewed at Cookham Wood expressed how their training and experience of facilitating had helped them make enormous strides forward in improving their communication skills and confidence.

#### **4.8 Involvement in the evaluation**

83% of respondents had been involved in selecting outcomes on which the evaluation was to focus. There appeared to be a relationship between



involvement in deciding the focus of the evaluation and participation in the evaluation interviews. As stated in an earlier section, Swaleside prisoners were not involved in the pre-evaluation discussions and demonstrated the most reluctance to participate in the evaluation.

Over half of the respondents viewed being involved in selecting the criteria for evaluation as a positive experience.

*I thought it was good they wanted to know. I was a bit knocked back that they even cared what I thought. (Cookham Wood case 1)*

However several of the prisoners thought that they could have played a more involved role:

*Well, we didn't do a lot did we. We just looked at this, didn't we, and picked out the most relevant statements, which I thought was OK. (Grendon case 11)*

Comments such as these led us to the surprise conclusion that most of the prisoners thought it was important to be involved in the process and that maybe we hadn't involved them enough.

#### **4.9 Factors unique to particular prisons**

In Swaleside the voluntary nature of participation appeared to be tenuous, with several prisoners indicating that there were coercive elements at play in getting them onto the course:

*The prison emphasises that you have to do these courses. Some people who want to go on them can't get on them. (Swaleside case 3)*

This could have also be a contributory factor to the rate of participation in the evaluation.

In Cookham Wood it was easier to see the positive influence of participants lives due to few other programmes confounding the evidence. However, the lack of complementary programmes brings its own problems as discussed above.

In Grendon it was harder for respondents to separate the effects from different programmes:

*It's not just AVP, it's a lot of things. (Grendon case 1)*

However, it was clear that AVP complemented and fitted in well with other programmes at Grendon:

*AVP was part of the Grendon process. It fitted in well with our therapy. When I did AVP I was half way through (therapy). I was just plodding about in my wellies. AVP came at the right time for me. It helped me move along. (Grendon case 4)*

*The workshop was a giant step... 'cos you take little steps in here. It was a giant step! (Grendon case 6)*



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions**

### **5.1 Summary of main points to be covered**

There are three distinct strands to this evaluation that require further comment. They can be articulated as follows:

- How successful is AVP in meeting its desired outcomes?
- How successful was the approach taken in the pilot evaluation?
- How useful is the proposed theoretical mechanism of change?

### **5.2 How successful is AVP in meeting its desired outcomes?**

The findings from this evaluation show that AVP has much to be proud of with its work in prisons in Britain. Given that some of the respondents had no formal contact with AVP (other than possibly a quarterly newsletter), the depth of description that many respondents gave about what happened in the workshops was remarkable. This demonstrated that AVP had made some significant personal impact on many participants.

The findings of this evaluation were based on self-reported changes by participants, rather than independently corroborated facts. However, to check up on participants would undermine programme integrity and is a weakness that has to be lived with. However, other assessments that have asked prison staff general questions about any improvements noticed which might be attributable to AVP have been entirely consistent with the types of changes reported by the prisoners themselves (Church and Hinds, 1997; Bitel and Church, 1995).

But how successful was AVP in meeting its ten desired outcomes that were prioritised for testing in this evaluation?

### **Highly successful**

AVP was highly successful in achieving six out of the ten prioritised outcomes. It would be convenient to define successful as helping 60% or more of the participants learn something new. But definitions of success are somewhat complicated. For example, although AVP may have caused a particular change in 50% of participants, a further 38% may have already known this. Success should be calculated at the ratio of 50% of all participants (50% equals say 20 people), out of the 62% of all the participants who were unfamiliar with this particular point of view (62% equals say 24 people). Helping 20 out of 24 people to change their thinking on a particular issue is a highly successful result. In this example, the 50% who report positive change as a result of the programme, actually represents an 83% success rate.

These six outcomes were:

- develop conflict resolution skills of active listening, assertiveness, co-operation and empathy
- experience affirmation
- explore their own role and responsibility in confrontational situations and see possible alternatives
- develop and experience trust in a supportive community environment
- recognise other people's point of view
- have possible opportunities to become AVP facilitators

### **Moderate success**

AVP achieved moderate success with a further three of the ten prioritised outcomes. Moderate success is defined as helping between 50% and 59% of participants to make changes in particular areas. These are:



- recognise that they always have choices
- understand the relationship between feelings and actions
- resolve familiar problems in non-violent/non-destructive ways by changing patterns of behaviour

### **Low success**

AVP fared least well in one area:

- improve their understanding of the skills and spirit for dealing productively with conflict inside and outside the prison system

This is arguably the most difficult outcome to achieve. A large proportion of respondents felt that had not dealt well with their most recent conflict. This may be attributable to two factors:

- (i) the low levels of understanding of Transforming Power
- (ii) the need to have repeated exposure to programme input to help bring about and sustain major behavioural change.

The first point could be achieved by providing further opportunities for AVP facilitators to sharpen their understanding and delivery of Transforming Power; while the second point would require more regular opportunities to take a workshop as a participant, or even to train more inmate facilitators, who get regular and repeated doses of the programme.

### **5.3 How successful was the approach taken in the pilot evaluation?**

Given that this was a pilot evaluation, it is fair to say that this evaluation was reasonably successful. It was largely conducted within the principles and philosophy outlined in Chapter 1.

The tricky issue of stakeholder negotiation was successfully managed by the advocacy process and circumnavigated without compromising the principles of negotiation and involvement.

A great majority of the most powerless stakeholders who were asked to reflect on their involvement in the process of prioritising outcomes, reported that it was a useful and positive experience. Some even went on to say that we could have involved them to a greater extent. It showed us that prisoners *would* be interested in greater levels of participation and involvement, contradicting our expectations.

The evaluation was highly resource intensive and could not have been conducted without the voluntary donation of time from the evaluators for both working party meetings and prison interviews. However, as a result of having completed this pilot evaluation, we now have a greater understanding of the range of likely responses, which could be useful in the construction of questions with more closed tick boxes. However, the telling of personal stories and experience will always be needed to some extent as a validity check against socially acceptable but false responses.

#### **5.4 How useful is the theoretical mechanism of change?**

AVP was found to contribute to building self-worth and self-esteem, which did enable trust to develop. AVP was moderately successful in helping participants to understand that they have choices; but this needs to achieve greater levels of success before we can more positively determine if it facilitates development of responsibility and a more regular practice of alternatives to violence.



More research needs to be undertaken to probe the theory deeper. Any subsequent evaluations might want to structure the area of questioning to follow the theoretical progression towards alternatives to violence. This was a particular weakness of this evaluation.

## Chapter 6: Recommendations to AVP

### 6.1 Recommendations for AVP programming

AVP needs to focus on the following areas for improvement:

- clearer communication Transforming Power
- successfully enabling participants get in touch with their previous experiences of non-violence
- increasing effective ways of developing participants' understanding of the relationship between feelings and actions
- more frequent opportunities in each prison AVP works within to deliver courses and ensure that access remains open to previous participants who want another dose
- ensuring that voluntary participation is upheld, and coercive regimes are actively discouraged

### 6.2 Recommendations for future evaluations

- Although this evaluation went some way in involving prisoners and staff prior to the evaluation, greater effort must be made to involve prisoners and staff in the evaluation process prior to the evaluation.
- Categories developed during the analysis of the qualitative data collected during this pilot evaluation could be used to develop appropriate tick boxes for future evaluation interview schedules. This would enable more respondents to be interviewed, in a shorter period of time.



# **Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Code of practice for AVP Evaluation Working Party**

**Appendix 2a: The anticipated outcomes of participation in AVP for prisoners**

**Appendix 2b: The outcomes prioritised for the pilot evaluation of AVP**

**Appendix 3: The pilot AVP evaluation interview schedule**

**Appendix 4: The interview consent form**

## Appendix 1: Code of practice for AVP Evaluation Working Party

1. This evaluation is being undertaken on behalf of the AVP Britain Representatives Group.
2. The Home Office will be notified and consulted prior to the commencement of the evaluation.
3. The Evaluation Working Party will assign a Core Team to each prison involved in the evaluation. The Governor of each prison will be notified of the lead person in the core team evaluating AVP at their prison. Communication will routinely take place between the representatives of the prison and the core team leader.
4. All evaluators will follow prison service rules and regulations and conduct themselves according to the same principles which guide outside volunteers during AVP workshops.
5. The evaluation is being project managed by Mark Bitel. In the unlikely event of any problems or complaints contact should be made directly to Mark Bitel c/o BM AVP, London, WC1N 3XX (Tel: 01494-792035).
6. Mark Bitel will organise appropriate training and support for evaluation working party members. All evaluators will have undertaken induction and training into conducting this evaluation within the prison environment.
7. All project paperwork, including notes from meetings will be copied to all members of the evaluation working party at all times to ensure clear communication.
8. All official correspondence and documentation between a core team will be routinely copied to the Governor at the relevant prison.
9. Interview schedules will be developed with participation from all stakeholders in the evaluation.
10. The interview schedule will be piloted in a prison outside the main evaluation.
11. Participation in the evaluation by staff and prisoners must be voluntary. At all times staff and prisoners have the right to engage with or withdraw from the evaluation.
12. All data collected will be anonymised to preserve confidentiality.
13. Local AVP groups will have access to all data collected within the prisons they offer workshops.



**Appendix 2a: The anticipated outcomes of participation in AVP for prisoners**

Develop conflict resolution skills of active listening, assertiveness, co-operation, & empathy
Recognise that they always have choices
Experience affirmation
Explore their own role and responsibility in confrontational situations and see possible alternatives
Have an opportunity to practice alternatives
Develop and experience trust within a supportive community environment
Recognise other people's point of view
Use "Transforming Power" (power to change)
Increase awareness of causes of violence (fear, stereotyping, power, etc)
Be conscious that they have already used some alternatives to violence
Develop insight into violent feelings
Understand the relationship between feelings and actions
Value diversity of opinion, experiences and background
Improve their understanding of the skills and spirit for dealing productively with conflict inside and outside the prison system
Experience co-operation within a community environment during workshops
Resolve familiar problems in non-violent/non-destructive ways by changing patterns of behaviour
Set their own personal goals
Have possible opportunities to become AVP trainers



Appendix 2b: The outcomes prioritised for the pilot evaluation of AVP

Develop conflict resolution skills of active listening, assertiveness, co-operation, & empathy
Recognise that they always have choices
Experience affirmation
Explore their own role and responsibility in confrontational situations and see possible alternatives
Develop and experience trust within a supportive community environment
Recognise other people's point of view
Understand the relationship between feelings and actions
Improve their understanding of the skills and spirit for dealing productively with conflict inside and outside the prison system
Resolve familiar problems in non-violent/non-destructive ways by changing patterns of behaviour
Have possible opportunities to become AVP trainers



### Appendix 3: The pilot AVP evaluation interview schedule

#### Introduction:

My name is ..... And my colleague is .....

Can I just check your name?

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We will detach this piece of paper from the rest of the form after the interview.

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the AVP evaluation. Could you take a moment to read this consent form and sign it. Please ask me if you need any help with it.

(Turn over to the next page when the signed consent form is returned to you).

1a. How many AVP workshops have you done?

☐

Details to be circled by note taker			
Prison	SW	CW	GR

1b. Can you remember roughly when it was/they were?

.....

.....

OK let's begin. This interview should take no more than an hour. I will ask you some questions about your experiences in AVP workshops and the period since the workshops. We are seeking your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions... we just want to know what you think. OK?

..... is here to write down what you say during the interview.  
..... will not be asking you any questions. Sometimes we may have to ask you to slow down so that ..... can catch up. But sometimes we miss important things so we would like to tape record this interview. It will not be played to anyone else and it will be destroyed when we complete the research. Is that OK with you?

Here we go.....

2a. Do you think that different people can have different points of view?

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*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

2b. Did the workshop help you to understand other people's point of view?

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PAGE 1

*(continue on back sheet if needed)*



2c. What do you do when someone disagrees with you (or if you disagree with them)?

[illegible]

(continue on back sheet if needed)

2d. Can you give me an example?

[illegible]

(continue on back sheet if needed)

2e. And when this happens, what do you feel?

[illegible]

2f. And has this changed since the workshop?

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*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

3a. Tell me about the last confrontation situation you were in. When was this?

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3b. How do you think you handled it?

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4a. Can you describe to me some techniques or skills of non-violence that you learned during your AVP workshop(s)?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

(continue on back sheet if needed)

4b. Since you took part in the workshop, has there been a situation in which you have used these skills in the prison? Can you tell me about it?  
[if no, go to q.4f]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

4c. Was this different from what you would have done before? [if yes, prompt: How?]

(continue on back sheet if needed)

4d. Has this affected your relationships with anyone in your life, inside or outside of the prison? [If so] Can you tell me how?  
[prompt: what about inside/outside *whichever one they haven't mentioned*]

PAGE 5

(continue on back sheet if needed)





5b. Has this changed as a result of doing the workshop? [If yes] How?

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*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

6. Did you learn anything in the workshops that gave you alternative ways of dealing with familiar problems. [prompt to explore any of these]

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*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

7. Did doing the workshop help you to remember times in the past when you had already used some alternatives to violence?

[If yes] Did you find that helpful? YES [If yes] What was helpful?

NO [If no] What was unhelpful?

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PAGE 7

*(continue on back sheet if needed)*



8a. During the workshops did you have an opportunity to practice alternative ways of resolving conflicts?

NO [if no, go to q.8c]

YES [if yes, go to q.8b]

8b. Can you describe a specific example?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

(continue on back sheet if needed)

8c. Has AVP given you any insights into how you tend to respond when you're in a confrontational situation?

[illegible]

8d. Do you think that you have any responsibility for some of the conflict in your life?

YES

NO

Can you tell me why that is so?

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*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

8e. Do you think your view about your own responsibility in conflict situations has changed since the workshop?

YES [if yes: can you explain how it has changed?]

NO [if no: why is that?]

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9a. What can you tell me about the way that feelings and actions are connected?

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9b. [If positive response is given] Did you know this before you took the workshop or as a result of the workshop?

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10a. How do you feel other people treated you inside the workshop?

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10b. How do you feel that you reacted to other people inside the workshop?

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10c. Did any of the exercises make you feel good about yourself?

YES [if yes] Which exercises were they? Why did they make you feel good?

NO [if no, go to q.10e]

10d. Can you explain any ways in which that's affecting you now?

10e. Did any of the exercises make you feel bad about yourself?

[if no] go to q.11.

[if yes] Which ones? Why was that?



10f. Have you any suggestions about changing and improving that exercise?

[illegible]

11. Does it make any difference to you that the AVP facilitators are all volunteers and are not paid? [If so] What differences?

[illegible]

(continue on back sheet if needed)

12a. Do you know that prisoners can become AVP facilitators?

YES

NO

12b. What do you think about the idea of inmate facilitators?

PAGE 12

(continue on back sheet if needed)

13a. [not to be asked at Swaleside]

Did you take part in the pre-evaluation exercise to help us choose the areas we would look at in this evaluation? [prompt if needed: where we showed you the laminated card and asked you to choose what we should look at in the evaluation?]

YES

NO

13b. [if yes] Have you got any thoughts on that process?

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We are coming to the end of the interview now. Before we do, could you read this card and tell me, in your opinion, which are the 5 most important areas for AVP workshops to address (show laminated card and tick the five choices on the ).

Are there any other brief comments which you would like to add?

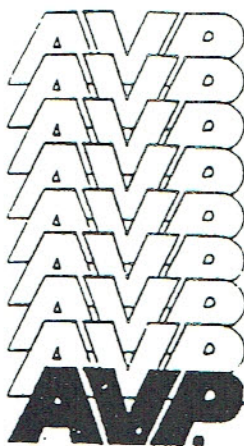
*(continue on back sheet if needed)*

Thank you for your time and help.

PAGE 13



#### Appendix 4: The interview consent form



## London Alternatives to Violence Project

BM AVP  
London  
WC1N 3XX

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### Information and consent sheet for the national evaluation of AVP in 3 British prisons – June/July 1997

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this national evaluation of AVP which is being conducted in HMP Cookham Wood, HMP Grendon and HMP Swaleside.

The evaluation is being conducted in order to provide AVP with information about the effectiveness of AVP workshops in helping prisoners to improve their conflict resolution skills and to explore alternatives to violence. Your views are important and the findings from the evaluation will be used to improve the way we run future workshops.

#### Interviews

You will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Notes and recordings will be made during the interview. These notes and recordings are for the use of the research team only, who are independent of the prison Service, and will not be shared with any outside parties. They will be destroyed once the research is complete by the end of the year.

#### Confidentiality

Your name will not be used at any time in the research and your views will not be directly fed back to the prison authorities.

#### Ethical guidelines

This research complies with the ethical guidelines set by the British Sociological Association.

#### Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time and this will not affect your future opportunities to participate in further AVP workshops.

#### Consent

Please indicate that you agree to being interviewed for this research by signing below. This form will not be attached to the notes from your interview.

*I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that all information given to the researchers will be held in confidence and will be used for research purposes only.*

Signed by : \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

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